

EXPOSURE-IMMERSION PROGRAMME

-An attempt in Contextualised Formation

**By SVD Deacons
1998**

Directed by:
Fr. John Vattamattom SVD

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Jaison George, SVD

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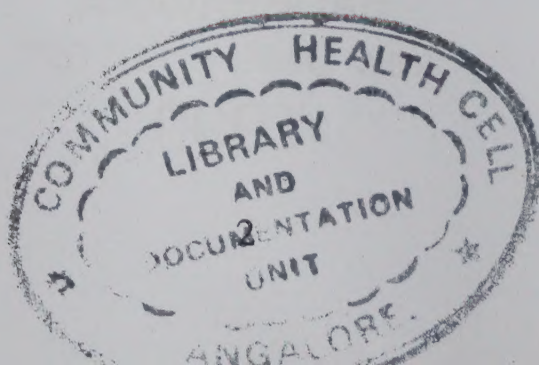
DEDICATED

**To all those who had to pay a heavy price
to bring about God's Reign and a more just society
and**

To all those who dare to follow them.

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INTRODUCTION

I could not find a better introduction to exposure-immersion than what was given by Fr. Dermond de Souza, CSSR. He narrates the experiences of a lay catholic woman, Edwina Gateley, shared by her of "Ministry on the Edges" in *THE WAY*, April 1987. It began during a thirty day retreat, when she tried to discern where God would have her be. I am reproducing it here because of its depth and clarity.

"I gradually became painfully aware that God, far from calling me to the 'heart' of action, was calling me to the edges. Suddenly, I was assailed by images of streets, alleys, brothels, bars, prostitutes, street people. As I prayed and reflected, it became vividly clear that I must minister on the edges to those most edged out of our society and indeed, our Church.

"I did not relish the prospect. I felt I had no credentials, no experience. How does one begin? Where does one begin? How will I live? The questions were distributing. The fact that there were no answers was doubly disturbing.....There was no blueprint for this kind of ministry. No one it seemed had gone before me and got it worked out and nicely organized. I was thrown by God's grace into a new and frightening world with a vague sense that I was to be about some kind of mission."

EXPOSURE : The shock of helplessness

The only way for her to begin was to get exposed to the reality, so walking on the streets, getting lost, having drunks yell at her, being propositioned by men, being ignored by the others, became the training ground for ministry on the edges.

"There were no books on how to minister to prostitutes and street people, I would have to learn from mistakes and experience.....My first tentative overtures to three prostitutes standing on a dimly lit street corner, were quickly and abusively respected..... It was a disappointing beginning."

However, her repeated attempts and her persistence finally aroused the curiosity of the three prostitutes. They first suspected she was a cop, a reporter, a psychologist and finally a nun. It was only when they were convinced that she had no credentials and no agenda, apart from wanting to make friends, that the prostitutes were prepared to accept her.

“The importance of being open and helpless was one of my first lesson in effective ministry on the edges. I came to understand that these people on the edges do not take happily to being rescued, cared for, helped or however you want to put it. For them, whether we like it or not, we represent the ‘Straight’, white (usually) establishment. We represent the ones who have made it, the educated and ‘got-together’ elite. Often the greatest humiliation they might suffer is our benevolence. However, in this particular case, I had no resources to be benevolent; I was the alien – the stranger- the lost one. I did not know what I was about. I was dependent upon their welcoming me and leading me. Who else would show me the world of the prostitutes and the homeless, but the prostitutes and the homeless? So it was those whom I was sent to minister, who began to lead and teach me.”

EXPOSOURS : Flood of confused emotions

Edwina Gateley began visiting one of the brothels regularly. She sat with the hookers while their customers come in and out. She observed some of the pain and despair of the women. Almost all of them had an addiction alcohol or drugs. “We can’t do it if we are sober,” was their common expression. But for Edwina it was a flood of conflicting emotions. She was confused, embarrassed, even guilty about condoning prostitution. She experienced “one wave of emotion after another-anger at the men and their respectability, helplessness before the blatant abuse and pain sadness at the obvious misery of the women.” These were many questions but no answers. So she just sat and said nothing. “Deeply moved by the injustice of the penal system that punishes the women prostitutes but not the men clients,” Edwina wrote in her Journal.

IMMERSION : The beginning of humility and understanding.

As she got closer to the women, many of her preconceived ideas and conditioning were shattered. These were not the hostile, grasping and aggressive women they are portrayed to be. They began to reveal other sides of themselves. When they thought no one was looking, their faces were etched in misery and loneliness. Gradually, they revealed themselves to her.

“There began to emerge a profile of the average prostitute: almost all had been victims of incest and abuse as children – some from infancy. All had been victims of incest and abuse as children –some from infancy. Because of their disturbed backgrounds, most had not completed school and had poor education; all had some form of criminal record through prostitution and had started walking the streets as teenagers. The profile was frightening. These women had never stood a chance. From the word go, they had been abused. It was not surprising they did not have any self-esteem to get themselves out of their abusive lifestyles.....They were very much aware that they were ‘bottom of the pile’, ‘the sinners’, the scum of the earth’, as one prostitute in tears described herself.”

IMMERSION : Solidarity with God among His people.

One day the Madame of the brothel said a very encouraging thing to Edwina, “It seems different when you are here.” That is all one can expect with ministry on the edges. There are no clear results, no goals or success-just being there, exposing one’s self to the pain and suffering of the people at the edges of our society and becoming a more compassionate person in the process.

“Ministry on the edges is hard, very hard. It has taken me a few years to learn that I can heal or cure no one – that only God has the power to transform and bring forth the new life. All I can do is be present, absorb some of the pain-so that hopefully, I might be a little transformed and pray that God will touch other lives through me.”

OUR GOD : The unexpected One.

Edwina Gateley learned from experiences that God acts in ways we least expect. She had tried to 'help' a twenty seven year old prostitute called Teddy Bear. But all her efforts to 'rehabilitate' her ended in failure.

One day three years later she was informed. "Teddy Bear is dead." She felt a terrible, stunning emptiness within her, not the tender compassionate God. Yet at the funeral service, the funeral parlour was packed with street people – prostitutes, homeless, pimps and drug pushers. They sat side by side with priests and nuns and middle class Christians who had come to know Teddy Bear through Edwina's work with her. Tears flowed in the chapel. People sobbed for Teddy Bear. One of the street people placed a single rose on her coffin.

"Teddy Bear had brought black and white, the lion and the lamb, the rich and the poor together. The God within me all stirred and clasped us year old women who lived such a life of misery and degradation, who, within it all, had learned to laugh and live a little, and who somehow managed to touch so many of us so deeply enough to experience God, to bring us all together in our brokenness.

"My experience with Teddy Bear taught me, more than anything else, that the ministry on the edges is one where we received and learn more than we are able to teach or to do; but also that amongst all the pain and poverty, we must hold on to a fragile burning hope that somehow, somewhere, sometime, there will be a new life – probably where we least expect it?"

I hope that this story of Edwina Gateley will serve as a source of inspiration for many to choose the much needed "ministry on the edges."

Fr. John Vattamattom SVD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Though there were discussions at various levels in the past on the role of exposure programme in the formation, nothing much has been materialised so far in a scientific way, in our formation programme. Exposure alone will not bring in the desired result. Hence the programme of exposure immersion. In the 1980s this was conducted among and for the Asian Bishops under the auspices of the Office for Human Development (OHD) of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC). It has been conducted to provide experiential learning opportunities for Church people, to bring about awareness and understanding of the realities of poverty, oppression, marginalisation and suffering among the people.

This is a dynamic tool in the conscientization processes. By this the pastoral workers enter in to the life struggles of the poor and the marginalised. They are able to bring out the potential of the people and make use of them to bring about lasting changes.

Hence involvement with the poor for longer period, participating in their struggles and empathising with them form the essential part of exposure-immersion program. This was the background of the proposal of organizing this programme. In this attempt, I am grateful, in the first place, to the three provincials and their councilors and other members of the interprovincial planning Board for accepting this proposal and giving the green signal to go ahead. Next I am grateful to the twenty four deacons who, though hesitating in the beginning, as mentioned by practically all, took up this challenge so courageously. There are ever so many people with whom I had discussed the idea and who positively and directly contributed to the success of this programme. It is not possible to mention the names of all of them here. However I can not but mention at least some of them. Fr. Desmond de Souza CSSR was with us for the orientation and also for the final evaluation. As secretary of OHD of FABC, he was responsible for initiating such a process for the members of

FABC. I am grateful for his valuable contribution. Other resource persons like Prof. P. Ramachandran, Fr. T.K. John, SJ, Mr. Rudy Lobo, Dr. Ravi Narayan Fr. John Desrochers, Dr. V. Benjamine, Fr. Joe Chenakala SJ and others have contributed substantially for the success of this programme. Of course the heads of various institutions/organisations whose names are already mentioned in this report. But for their constant support, help and guidance, this programme could not be a success. I am indeed very grateful to them. In compiling this report our deacons Jaison George, Sebastian Myladiyil and Walter Mendonca worked tireless days and sleepless nights. I am very grateful to them for this great efforts.

For anything one factor is money. Extra expenses were involved in this process. Like number of occasions in the past for my activities, Missio Aachen came forward to meet part of the expenses of this programme. I take this opportunity to thank all those in Missio Aachen for this their generous help. Last but not the least the hundreds and thousands of poor and marginalized people who interacted with our deacons and contributed to their formation. To all of them I give a BIG THANK YOU,

-Fr. John Vattamattom SVD

PREFACE

This report is a comprehensive presentation of the various stages of the Exposure Immersion Program for the SVD deacons. The program was for a period of six months, commencing from June, ending in November 1998. This report is presented in two stages. The first stage contains a brief account of the whole process of the Exposure Immersion package. The second part - the Appendix - contains the group as well as personal reflections and insights as shared by the deacons during the final evaluation of the program. Through this report we aim at sharing the rich experiences that the participants had in their respective places of Exposure and Immersion. We hope this report will be able to present the reader with a realistic picture of the process and development of the program.

This is the place for the participants of the program to thank a number of people for their continued support and encouragement throughout the course of this program. Our sincere thanks are due to the Provincial Superiors of the three Indian SVD provinces and the Formation Secretary Fr. Jose P.A. SVD for providing us with an opportunity to have a contextualized experience at this stage of our formation. Words are not enough to express our gratitude to Fr. John Vattamattom SVD who as the Central Mission Secretary conceived and so painstakingly facilitated the entire program.

A big “thank you” to all the persons in-charge of the various institutions/organisation in which we spent nearly six months and also for their timely and expert guidance. Last, but not the least, we thank in a special way our resource persons who gave their best and guided us at various stages of this wonderful experience.

Jaison George SVD

Sebastian Myladiyil SVD

Walter Mendonca SVD

ORIENTATION AND THE FIELDS

In order to equip the deacons to face the actual situations in their respective places of experiences three days of orientation program was held at Divine Word Seminary, Pune from 25th to 27th May 1998. Fr. Desmond D'Souza CSSR, the former secretary of FABC with his vast range of experience threw light on the manifold dimensions of exposure immersion program. He highlighted the need for alternative ministries in the Church in terms of social involvement with the poor and the marginalised of the society. Drawing our attention to what Jesus did at his time, he said that our mission today could be relevant only if we immerse ourselves into the burning issues of the people who are in the lowest strata of the society.

The whole exposure immersion program was presented in the following four steps:

1. Exposure and immersion to the reality: At the outset the person experiences and becomes aware of the reality, gradually he/she gets immersed into the situation as a friend.
2. Social Analysis: (Signs of the Times): Here one begins to probe into the particular social factors that create the particular dehumanizing situation.
3. Theological Reflection: (Discussing in the light of the Gospel): At this stage one tries to understand what God is saying to him/her in the given situation.
4. Pastoral Planning: (Missionary Response): Drawing a concrete action plan for the radical transformation of the situation.

The whole process is guided in the light of prayer. The general orientation helped the deacons to draw out specific objectives keeping in mind that the ultimate aim of the Exposure Immersion program is to arrive at a renewed understanding of our mission and spirituality.

Expectations expressed by the deacons at the end of the orientation program were:

- To enable one to be close to people, facing stark realities of life.
- To transform one's life
- To learn to take personal responsibility and learn something for life.

Twenty four deacons were placed into different organizations in different states of the country as follows:

1. Jaison George and Mathew Abraham

Gramashram, Jellipara, Attapady, Kerala among tribals. C/o Fr. Mani CST.

2. John Kennedy and Terrance M

Small Christian communities movement, Nagarcoil, Tamilnadu, among Dalits. C/o Fr. M.J. Edwin.

3. Walter Mendonca and William Pais

Jana-Jagaran, Belgaum, Karnataka among dalits. C/o Fr, Joe Chenakala SJ.

4. Sebastian M, Victor Rodrigues and Ranjit Ekka

PREM, Berhampur, Orisssa among tribals, dalits and fisherfolk. C/o Frs. Jacob and Chacko.

5. Ronald Pereira, Biju George and Anuranjan Dung Dung

Puri, Orisa, among leprosy patients and other poor people. C/o Fr. Peter Vattakeril SVD.

6. Joseph V.L. and Medard Tirkey

Community Centre , Rourkela, Orissa among slum dwellers. C/o Fr. John Alappatt SVD.

7. Jojo George and David Raju M

PIN Society, Hyderabad, A.P. among slum dwellers. C/o Bro. Varghese Theckanath.

8. Roy Joseph and Michael Pragasam

Poorvanchal, Chetana Samiti, Raghoupur, U.P. among dalits. C/o Fr. Abhishiktananda IMS.

9. Pius Lakra and Pradeep Minj

Lok Chetana Samiti, Sarnath, Varanasi, U.P. among dalits C/o Neeti Bhai IMS.

10. Jomon K.V. and Arokiasamy K.A.

Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti, Barh, Patna, Bihar, among dalits. C/o Fr. Jose Kananaikil SJ.

11. Callisto Gomes and Edward Fernandez

SPHURTI/ BADC, Nandurga, Latur, Maharastra among dalits, tribals and victims of the 1993 earthquake. C/o Fr. Jeevendra Jadhav SJ.

MID-TERM SHARING, REFLECTION AND FURTHER INPUTS

After about three months of living experience in the field the deacons gathered in two different venues for sharing their experiences, reflections and for further inputs. Those who were in the north gathered at Sadbhavana, Delhi (17th - 20th August 1998) and those in the south at Maria Bhavan, Bangalore (24th - 27th August 1998).

The participants present in the mid-term sharing besides the deacons were Fr. John Vattamattom SVD, the director of the exposure immersion program, Fr. P.A. Jose SVD, the Formation Secretary, the heads of various organizations with whom the deacons were placed, Fr. James, Director of CHAI and the following resource persons: Mr. Rudi Lobo and Fr. T.K. John in Delhi and Dr. Ravi Narayan, Dr. Benjamin and Fr. John Desrochers CSC in Bangalore. In his inaugural address at both the places Fr. John Vattamattom pointed out that both sharing and listening to others experiences and learning from each other are important in the learning process of the program.

The initial struggle to get acquainted to the new places and situations was prominent in the sharing of the deacons. The struggles came up in various forms: the scorching heat of the summer, inhuman and awful living conditions of the slums, the penance of adjusting to one's own culinary abilities, initial indifference and resistance of the people, mental block in reaching to the leprosy patients, constant fear of the vandals and anti-social elements etc. In certain cases the struggle was to such an extent that some of the deacons even thought of discontinuing the program halfway. However, the "perseverance and openness", the deacons shared "led us to newer and richer experiences." The presence of the organizational heads with whom the deacons were placed and the narration of their struggles on their way towards discovering their mission was a matter of comfort for the deacons during the mid term sharing.

The whole sharing was under the direction and timely intervention of the resource persons. They shared their insights derived from their vast life experiences. The thrust of their sharing centred around the need to take a diversion from the conventional mode of ministries and developing alternative vision for our times.

Having enriched by each other's sharing and reflections, the deacons returned with concrete action plans to further get immersed in their respective places.

FINAL EVALUATION

At the completion of the period of the Exposure Immersion Program deacons gathered at Atma Dharshan, Mumbai, 18-21 November 1998 for the final sharing and evaluation of the program. It was held in the presence of the Provincial superiors of the three Indian provinces, Fr. John Vattamattom SVD, the co-ordinator of EIP, Fr. P.A. Jose SVD, the Formation Secretary and Fr. Stanislaus SVD, the Director of the Pastoral Course. Fr. Desmond D'Souza CSSR and Prof. Ramachandran guided the discussions and deliberations of the sharing and evaluation.

Following were the criteria highlighted by Fr. Desmond for the sharing.

1. From an institutional form of mission to a people centred one.
 - 1.1 Change in the content of mission: content is no more a pre-fabricated one, but must be decided by the burning life issues of the people.
 - 1.2 Change in the style of mission: No more enforcement from outside, but an earnest effort to understand and accompany people in their culture.
 - 1.3 Change in the place of mission: No more the church or the door of an institution, but the place where the people are; where the struggle between sin and grace takes place.
2. Change in spirituality;
 - 2.1 From a church-centred to a kingdom centred spirituality,
 - 2.2 From sacramental encounter to people encounter.
 - 2.3 From a two dimensional understanding of the world as holy at creation and corrupted by sin to a three dimensional understanding of the world, i.e., world is holy at creation, corrupted by sin and now being transformed into the kingdom of God through the resurrection of Jesus (GS 4).

Keeping in mind the above criteria, deacons proceeded with presenting the reflections on their group and personal experiences in their respective places. Following are the prominent issues came up in the light of the sharing.

1. How can we meaningfully reconcile the two existing polarities in the emphasis of our ministry, namely, the church-centred vs. people centred?
2. To what extent, alternative ministries to which deacons were exposed to are relevant in the traditional priesthood as many are doing this alternative ministry effectively outside the structured priesthood?
3. The perceived need to widen the dimension of priesthood i.e., from cultic to prophetic, meaning involvement in social justice, political awareness, human rights etc.

These issues were further discussed under the following questions.

1. What is the central mission and the missionary priority of SVDs? What is the process of implementation?
2. What is SVD spirituality for our times in the light of its charism
3. In the context of a paradigm shift in priestly identity can social work and pastoral ministry be meaningfully integrated?
4. Can political empowerment be a part of SVD missionary concern?
5. What should be the basic thrust of SVD formation? What is the relevance of Exposure Immersion program in our ongoing formation and SVD formation in general?

These questions were discussed in groups, a report of which was then presented in the general meeting in which further clarifications and discussions took place.

Reports of Group Discussions on the above questions

1. The central mission of an SVD is witnessing Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Good News. The mode of proclamation is not merely limited to verbal proclamation rather involving in the burning issues of the people which may vary from place to place. In today's context one of the important areas of SVD missionary activity should be incarnating the power of the Word of God in dehumanizing conditions. Through this we aim at building communities that will represent the Kingdom of God which forms the core of Jesus' vision of a new society.
2. The charism of our society highlights our involvement in the frontier missions and situations of today's world. 'Frontier' here is to be seen in the wider sense of the word, not merely the traditional sense of geographical frontier. 'Frontier' here is to be understood as every sphere of existence which needs a genuine transformation. The distinguishing characteristic of SVD spirituality is the incarnational aspect, i.e., the 'Word becoming flesh'. After the Exposure Immersion experience we see our spirituality in the light of the struggles of the people and our struggles to meaning out of the whole experience. As SVDs, we are expected to be involved in the struggles of the people from within. We are meant to be 'persons of God and persons for people'. This aspect of priestly spirituality must be reflected in action and in service. Hence SVD spirituality is to be more of servant spirituality and less of a master/leader spirituality.
3. In the context of the paradigm shift that has taken place in the understanding of the role of a priest a proper integration of pastoral duty and social involvement is called for. The paradigm shift that has taken place is not in the newer understanding of priesthood but in emphasis of the role of the priest in today's society. In place of the traditional emphasis on the mere cultic role, the shift calls for giving greater emphasis on the prophetic dimension which would demand a radical involvement in the life struggle of the people. For a

traditional mind pastoral activities and social work may appear to be two separate entities. But realistically speaking they are two dimensions of one mission. Social work is not a secular work but there is something sacred in it. As a priest when one is involved in social work one does not see social work as social work but as one's mission. (It is interesting to note that only a social worker priest raises eyebrows while a doctor-priest or a principal priest does not.) A priest who is a representative of Jesus has to make Jesus' mission his own. As Jesus' mission was a comfort to the oppressed and a challenge to the oppressor, a priest's task is the re-living of this mission of Jesus in today's context. Is not our involvement in the life-struggles of people a continued living out of the ritual celebration of the Eucharist?

4. Today we speak of the needed shift from welfare and developmental approach to empowerment process. Certainly, in our work with the poor if the strategy is the welfare approach we continue to perpetuate the dependency syndrome. On the other hand if it were empowerment we would help people to be free and enable them to stand on their own legs. Empowerment can bring in lasting effect only if the people have a say in the decision making which means an active political involvement. By political involvement we do not mean party politics, but the need to emerge a critical political consciousness through political education and conscientisation. We are not suggesting the SVDs to enter into politics or leading the people from forefront, though in certain situations we may even be called upon to do so, but we play the role of an animator or a facilitator to create conducive atmosphere through which people are helped to become a moral force to counter the corrupt political system. As Christians and SVDs we are compelled to reflect how far the above mentioned truly become relevant continuation of Jesus' mission fitting to our context. Falling back into our charism of working in frontier missions and situations, we are called to consider involvement in political empowerment process of the voiceless as a relevant means of living out the mission of Jesus.

We are aware that we are making a very serious proposition which can challenge and disturb our comfortable existence. At the outset itself we need to see whether we have the courage and correct dispositions to meet the possible endangering situation. We need to possess the qualities like conviction, commitment, ongoing radical transformation and above all staunch faith in Jesus who wants us to respond effectively to alleviate the suffering of the poor and the marginalized. We also ask the question whether we are ready to give up privileged position as leaders and move to the periphery, allowing people to move right into the central stage?

5. The basic thrust of SVD formation is to prepare one to proclaim the Good News to the frontier places and situations. In the light of our exposure immersion experience we understand the proclamation of the Good News, not merely verbal, but more concretely through our involvement in the burning life issues of the people. We as a group who underwent this program felt the relevance of it in three levels:
 - A. Knowledge level - we witnessed the dehumanizing and exploitative situations in our respective places of experiences.
 - B. Feeling level - as we were immersed in the situation we began to feel with the people and tried to look at the problems and realities from people's perspectives.
 - C. Value level - considering it as a priority, knowing the problems and feeling the seriousness from people's perspective compel us to consider the involvement in people's struggles and radical commitment to the cause of the less privileged as a value for ourselves.

Therefore as part of our ongoing formation we wish to make sustained effort to keep the experiences and insights alive by our involvement in alternative ministries. Though such an attempt can be concretely realized only through individual effort, we sought a concrete group effort, i.e., those who work in a

particular province would come together at regular intervals for mutual sharing support encouragement and enrichment.

The following suggestions were made to incorporate exposure immersion program in our seminary formation

- A. Formators undergo a program of similar nature for a brief period (10-15 days). This would enable the formators to discern for themselves the relevance of exposure immersion in our structured seminary formation.
- B. Exposure immersion for a longer period, i.e., up to one year is to be arranged after philosophical studies, perhaps at the time of Regency. Such a move is intended to give a sound experiential knowledge of being with the people for a better theological reflection. This would also give one sufficient time to take decision about one's future ministry.
- C. Incorporate apostolates which involve experiences of similar nature in various stages of formation.

Conclusion

The participants of this program expressed their appreciation for having organized such a unique venture as part of the diaconate ministry. Having been enriched by the experiences of being in the frontier situations the deacons have resolved to live in this spirit which might be reflected in their future ministry and involvement. Of course, the formal evaluation of the program ends here, but the actual effects of it must be evaluated in terms of witness in the life of the participants.

APPENDIX I

Reports of the Group Sharing

1. COMMUNITY WELFARE CENTRE, Rourkela: Joseph V.L and Medard Tirkey:

Seva Sadan which is part of Community Welfare Society has dedicated itself for various human developmental activities such as health care, conscientizing the people through seminars to realize their basic rights to live with full human dignity and self-worth. Seva Sadan brings the people together for common activities like digging wells, making roads etc. Keeping in mind the objectives of the organization and the objectives of Exposure Immersion Programme we had set our own personal objectives i.e., to become more close to the people with whom we work in order to know them better, understand them and experience their life-struggle.

In order to achieve these objectives, we focused our effort in one particular slum. We visited the people every day and spent time with them. So our prolonged and constant visit gave us an opportunity to be with them and listen to their harsh realities of life. This also paved way to establish workable relationship in order to win over their confidence and trust in us. As a result they began to share with us their life struggles, the organized and systematic exploitation, corruption and injustice meted out on them. Having listened to their various struggles we had a feeling of helplessness, for the people expected us to help them out. But we were not able to act immediately as the oppressors had strong men and money power and had full control over the people, Hence, we realized the need to organize the people. For unless the people are organized and united it is difficult to fight against the unjust elements and find a way out. We stayed in a slum for a month to enrich our experience and realize some of our said objectives. During this stay we got more opportunities to be with the people and undergo the life struggles with them. Here, we would like to acknowledge that the experience we had was only a partial one. Still we were able to participate in their life-style by managing with the limited facilities available and cooking our food.

Now when we look back we do feel a great sense of satisfaction of having achieved our objectives to a great extent. Hence, this experience was indeed, an enriching one for us.

The exposure and immersion gave us ample opportunities to witness the injustice done to the poor and take part in the struggles of the people for justice and human dignity. Now we strongly believe that we need to re-think our mission today. As Jesus' mission was to build the community of love, peace and equality, today we are called to partake in his mission. There is also a growing need to join hands with the people of good will irrespective of religion, caste, culture and social status to build a better world.

We strongly recommend this program in the regular course of the formation. We feel that regency may be a good stage to have this experience.

2. Small Christian Communities Movement, Nagercoil: John Kennedy and Terrance M.:

We reached Nagercoil, the place of our Exposure Immersion Programme, on the 30th May 1998. Our initial anxiety and fear of not knowing the place and the people soon disappeared as people were very friendly and loving. 'Nala Oli Iyakkam' was founded to net work the poor people in the district. Empowerment of the poor, especially the women is its motto. The movement stresses very much the participation of the poor in the process of decision making. The organization believes in the power of the people and is guided by the motto "people's health in people's hand." So the movement aims at the empowerment of the poor that they can better their situation in the future.

Our experience in the small Christian Communities was very enriching. It has given us a new direction and orientation in the vision of our missionary life. As we were in a multi-religious contest, initially we had some hesitation to reach out to the people. This disappeared gradually and turned into friendship, as the people were open and sincere in their dealings with us. We were able to understand and appreciate their culture and their believes and we learned to be with them comfortably.

It was also an exposure to an alternative ministry. As priests we are called to read the signs of the time and respond to it. In this con-

text we realized that the content of our mission changes according to the context in which we are placed.

We also felt that building the kingdom communities of love, justice, brotherhood, the spirit of service is very essential. It was an opportunity to learn from the poor and the people made us aware of our preferential option for the poor in our missionary life.

The last six months were a period of learning. We saw people working hard with lot of commitment and dedication. This inspired us to be committed priests. As a whole we value this experience as a sprouting experience which has given us a new orientation and direction for our missionary life.

3. *JANA JAGARAN, Belgaum: William Pais and Walter Mendonca:*

As its name signifies, Jana Jagaran is 'awake' to the struggle of the masses against poverty, ill health, illiteracy, subhuman existence, exploitation, greed and consumerism. Hence, its chief objective is to be part of people's struggle and continue being a contrast phenomenon, inspiring hope and confidence in the search of our people for a renewed world of peace with justice and truth.

Jana Jagaran, has, in all, twenty-three full-time activists. Among them, six are Catholics and the remaining seventeen are Hindus- traditional shepherds, tribals and people from other backward communities. All the activists are from rural background and all of them are working among their people in the rural area. Jana Jagaran also has over 250 part-time animators. These are mainly rural men and women who are involved in the programmes like- pre-school education, tailoring class, literacy centres, health -care, self-help groups of women, watershed development, bio gas and rural sanitation. The full time and part time activists work together with a sense of belonging to the organization and are committed to the people with whom they work.

Our first assignment was to make a survey and spot inspection of the gohar gas plants built by JanaJagaran since 1992. It took us about three months to visit over 200 villages of the four talukas of Belgaum district. For the rest of the time of our stay, we were placed in a farm to help out in the activities of the farm as it was planned to be a demonstration farm for the traditional shepherds, introducing them to stall -feeding conditions. We also had the opportunity to be involved

for short periods in the programmes like pre-school education, self-help groups and health care.

Involvement in the activities of JanaJagaran was basically a learning experience for us. Our direct contact with the people during the bio gas survey exposed us to the living conditions and life-style of the poor and the marginalized of the society. The people we met were our textbooks who revealed to us that we have got much to learn from what they are and what they have to teach us.

It was a gradual awakening to us to look at the reality from the perspective of people. This called for shedding of our pre-conceived ideas and set pattern of thinking in order to tune ourselves to the given situation. The poor of Belgaum have taught us to be happy and content with the little, to fight the battle for justice with courage and patience.

The situation where we have been placed gave us a very good opportunity to prepare ourselves for the animating and leading role that we are called to play as priests in the society. Being in JanaJagaran, specially working closely with Fr. Joe Chenakala sj, gave us insights as to how can we go about motivating people at the grassroots, help them realize their potentials, and empower them to stand in dignity and self respect. We believe our role as priests is to stand by the people and struggle with them in their march towards liberation. This is how we can make the Kingdom of God present here and now.

The spirituality of each person depends on the situation in which one lives. In our context it is a spirituality of active involvement in the burning issues of the people. The motivating force and inner strength which sustained our involvement is the example of Jesus Himself, who came to this world to give fullness of life.

4. *POORVANCHAL CHETANA SAMITI, Raghoupur, U.P: Roy Joseph and Michael Pragasam:*

The Poorvanchal Gramina Chetana Samiti or Centre for Rural development is run by the Varanasi Diocesan Social Service Society with the help of the local people. Its work is spread out in Ballia, Ghazipur, Varanasi, Mau and Chandauli districts of U.P. Today the organization has eleven mandals. Each mandal has 25 to 30 village groups having a membership of about 40 in each group. Each group has got a five member working committee and has saving which they give as loan to the members. There are balvadis, adult literacy classes,

community health programmes in almost all these villages. The village groups come together once in fifteen days and discuss their problems and plan ways and means to tackle them. They collectively take initiative for getting electricity drinking water, approach roads to the villages etc. Though it is a Christian institution, its staff and services are not restricted to Christians alone.

Initially we faced many difficulties because of the sudden change from an institutional structure to a less structured setup. People, language, culture etc, were altogether different from our expectations. In the first two months we found it very difficult to go to the villages, as the approach roads were very dirty and muddy. We were entrusted with a village to form groups and we found it extremely hard to bring people together. Initially the people even suspected us. But constant visits, guidance and encouragement from fathers made what appeared initially impossible possible and we felt quite happy about our achievement.

Listening to the various struggles of the people was a painful experience for us. Very often we were not able to give them any answer and we remained helpless. This made us to have some attitudinal changes. Most of the places where we remained were non-Christian and the work of the priests among them was really inspiring. We were also quite impressed by the spirituality, simplicity and dedicated service of the IMS fathers.

The Exposure Immersion Programme has helped us to transcend the negative and see the positive values of care, concern and family bond that are present among the poor. Today we feel the need to move out from ministerial priesthood to prophetic dimension of priesthood for an all round development of humanity. We also realized the need to be simple in our life style and be available to the people. In the light of our experience we understand our mission is to build human communities where people live in true human dignity. This has to be done by being with the people, empowering them in their struggle towards liberation. For this we need to follow incarnational spirituality - involving ourselves in the life situations of the people and responding to the needs of the people as Jesus himself did.

5. *GRAMASHRAM, Attapady, Kerala: Mathew Abraham and Jaison George:*

We reached attapady on June 3, 1998 and were warmly welcomed to Gramashram by Fr. Mani CST, a human right activist, with whom we were placed. We stayed their for the entire period of the Exposure Immersion Program during which we had varied and useful experiences. One of the most important areas of our involvement was with the tribals who are an exploited lot. We began by visiting their settlements. In order to establish a good rapport with them we joined them in their works, shared their meals etc. The purpose behind this was to instill in them a sense of self-esteem. We experienced uncorrupted and innocent human values of sharing, concern and communitarian love in them.

Reaching out to people in need was another area of our involvement in Attapady. In one such case, we on our own initiative helped a poor family in the construction of their house. Their miserable place of existence compelled us to respond through manual labour. It was an enriching experience to know what it means to work like a daily labourer.

During our stay in Attapady, we also participated in various meetings and seminars at different parts of Kerala and Coimbatore. On such occasions we had the opportunity to meet many activists both religious and lay involved in various struggles of social concern. It was a nice exposure to alternative ministries. On August 6, we celebrated Hiroshima Day by going around conscientising people against the 'Bomb culture' and the importance of nonviolence. We also had the opportunity to attend a few lectures on social analysis by the FMM sisters who are engaged in championing human rights activities in Attappady.

In the latter part of our stay in Attapady we were engaged in building up a non-formal residential school for the tribal children. We contributed our share through manual labour and initial management of it. This school was a good venue to come to know the tribal culture in the form of songs and dances.

We were living like any other ordinary man in the village with regard to food, clothing and lodging. This made our contact with people easier as there was no barrier of a concrete structure and the boundary wall. It was also a time to learn cooking.

Fr. Mani CST, our local animator, is a man from whom we drew a lot of inspiration. As a human right activist he has been championing the causes of the poor tribals for more than twenty years. With his commitment and deep knowledge in philosophy, liberation theology and social analysis he enriched our thoughts and reflections. His commitment and simplicity of life will remain a source of inspiration forever.

We had occasional celebration of the Eucharist. We did not have any set time for prayer as each one was expected to live his life in freedom creatively. We used to join the tribal children for the common evening prayer which was in line with a cosmic spirituality which we found quite meaningful.

The objectives of the Exposure Immersion Programme was realized to a great degree as we had a first hand experience of the frontier situation in Attappady. We were immersed in the situation to a great extent and were given enough opportunities to be exposed to the frontier movements and to the people who are leading such movements. It was also a time for self-discovery and an opportunity to develop a new attitude to mission. As the mission of Jesus was open to all people without distinction, we the followers are to show that openness in our mission field. Our mission could be of raising human dignity and worth. Therefore our place has to be among people. Our spirituality should emerge from relationship and has to be closely connected with the life-struggles of the people. It need not be a spirituality of rubrics but one that enables us to meet the challenges of the situation. The reflection on the situation has to be incorporated in the celebration of the liturgy in order to make it concrete and meaningful to the participants.

This experience has brought us to the urgency to search for alternative ministries that might enable us to face concrete situations of life. This might require from our side to transcend the barriers of caste, religion, culture, sex etc. that we have created. Our mission need to be oriented in the interest of the society for its integral development where we need to resist the evil and mere avoidance or tolerance of it will not do any good to oneself and to one's neighbour. It is important to muster courage and support from the people with whom one is living and working. This kind of work on the other hand can bring a lot of frustration, as no success is visible in real terms instantly.

We would prefer this kind of an exposure before theology so that our theological inquiries may reflect the concrete situation of life. This program has opened a new possibility of being in the mission. This is an experience for us to learn to live and work in unfamiliar place and situations. It was also a time to re-evaluate our dispositions and attitudes.

6. *PREM, Berhampur, Orissa: Sebastian Myladiyil, Victor Rodrigues and Ranjit Ekka:*

'PREM' (People's Rural Education Movement) was initiated in 1982 by Frs. Jacob Thundiyl and Chacko Paruvanany, who went through a process of analysis and action to initiate a process for sustainable economic and political empowerment of the marginalized - tribals, dalits and fisherfolk of Orissa. The goal of PREM is the creation of a new social order in which the present unorganized and marginalized have a say in decision making; where education creates awareness and develops skills and fosters the growth of talents; where culture is ever creative; where men and women are totally liberated from all dehumanizing and oppressive forces where the decision of individuals and communities are based on the values of social justice, equality, truth, freedom and dignity of life. At present PREM is a large network, the activities of which are extended to over 5000 villages covering 8 Lakhs of people in Orissa and A.P.

We were constantly exposed to life situations of the tribals, dalits and fisherfolk. We visited people, stayed in their houses/community house in the village, called meetings to discuss the problems, involved in the education program of the children, made a survey of the land and house of the tribals in some villages which helped us to know their living conditions.

With a sense of gratitude we look back to the last six months' experiences, which were true to the spirit of exposure immersion program as we were exposed to various situations which helped us to achieve the vision and objectives to a greater extent. We look at Exposure Immersion program as a period of learning which helped us draw many valuable insights, awareness, inspirations etc.

Our life and involvement with the tribals, dalits and fisherfolk were in many ways an eye opener for us as it broadened our perspective in terms of the life style, culture, living standard, values, struggles etc. It was a period of witnessing to the power of people's movements emerged through empowerment.

This further led us:

- to be close to people and to witness the dehumanizing and exploitative elements still prevalent.
- to learn from them their values of sharing, generosity, deep spiritual convictions, simple life style etc..

to each one of us this experience was an opportunity for self-discovery, mainly about our attitude and aptitude towards the people, particularly to the less privileged ones.

As we are fast approaching the third millennium, we hear talks in every corner about the shift we need to have from a traditional way of functioning of a priest to a people oriented one (cultic to prophetic). From our experience we have come to the realization that our mission can be relevant only if we lay our focus on people, their burning issues, struggles that may vary from place to place. The faster we stop going to people with our package program, more relevant our presence would be.

Our experiences gave us ample opportunities to witness people (priests) involved in social issues. The shift initiated by PREM from welfare and developmental approach to the empowerment helped us to see how the latter has helped people to emerge as a force to meet their own needs and solve their own problems. Here comes the role of political empowerment and in this sphere we can be a catalyst or a facilitator.

The diverse experiences during the last six months have shaped and molded our convictions and commitment to work with the poor. This has helped us to value the animating role we are called to play in people's empowerment process. Another important awareness that emerged over the period is the need to work with people of similar interest even if they belong to different walks of life.

It was a period of discovering our spirituality and spiritual depth. At the initial stages lack of an organized spiritual activities created slight difficulties. Soon we got adjusted to it and we were able to integrate to some extent the daily experiences into prayer. Though we do not undermine the routine spiritual exercises there is a need to grow in it which would help us to cultivate in us genuine divine and human qualities like love, service, compassion etc. To certain extent we have

integrated these as we were able to become more sensitive to the people.

At the end we would say that we need to make a correct analysis (Socio-economic, cultural, religious and political) of the place before we venture into our mission. All of us are unanimous about the usefulness of Exposure Immersion program as it has helped us to draw valuable insights for life and given us certain directives for our future mission.

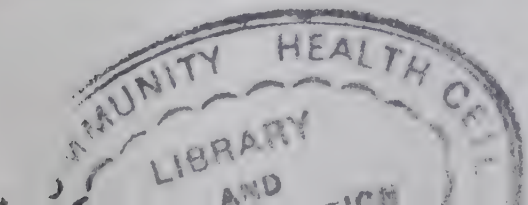
7. *CHAI CAMP, Latur, Maharashtra: Callisto Gomes and Edward Fernandes.*

Our work in Lathur was in the CHAI camp initiated by the Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI) Hyderabad, among victims of the 1993 earthquake. Initially we felt out of place looking at the well-off conditions of the villagers. As we got involved in the lives of the people we saw the scars and hurt memories of the tragedy still fresh in the minds of the people. CHAI continues to be a healing presence in the area.

In Latur we were face to face with the broken relationships in the family and the degrading moral standards. Alcoholism, discrimination based on caste and sex, murders, abductions etc were common phenomena. Such situations gave us opportunity to empathize with the sick and the broken especially during our involvement in the mobile clinic. We kept ourselves occupied with Mahilamandal meetings, conducting programs for youth and involving in health care, etc.

It was a time for us to learn to be sensitive to the needs of the people. Basically in our visits to the families we had to give a patient listening to the stories of hurt memories, exploitation and discrimination.

The Exposure Immersion Program gave us opportunity to take leadership and decisions in the absence of the director of the camp. It was also an enriching experience to be in a multi-religious community. This has broadened our outlook on others. In the light of our experience we understand our mission in a multi-religious contest. Our missionary activities have to be oriented towards the transformation of the unjust structures and de-humanizing situations with due respect to plurality of culture and religions. For this we need a spirituality that will guide us to participate in common issues and struggles of people



irrespective of caste and creed distinctions and thus enrich the lives of all whom we come in contact with.

8. *KARUNALAYA LEPROSY CARE CENTRE, Puri, Orissa:*
Ronald Periera, Anuranjan Dung Dung and Biju George:

The objectives of this program were satisfactorily realized during our stay in Karunalaya Leprosy Care Center Puri. We came in contact with the life and problems of the leprosy patients in the colony who are poor and marginalised. They are totally dependent on the mercy of others for their sustenance. The religion, society and their own family have rejected them because of their fatal disease. They are people looking for dignity in their life much more than a few coins and grains. Our being there, conversation, visits and close contacts were lessons for us for our lives.

It was an exposure to non-pastoral situations as well. Fr. Marianus Zelazek SVD, who began this leprosy colony, said that initially our mission Puri started not with the intention to work for leprosy patients. But he found that they needed the attention first and foremost. After twenty years of work, today we do not have a single Christian in the colony. Yet tirelessly he renders his help. We were exposed to the same situation and learned the lesson that our call as a priest is not only to a selected group of people, but to any one who is in need around us. Thus our life and work in the colony helped us to tune ourselves to the needs of the people irrespective of caste and creed. Our participation in their growth and development was restricted in our case because at present the colony is well organized and every thing is running smoothly. But we think our constant being with the leprosy patients, conversations with them visits to their families, touching them, laughing with them were best ways of learning process for our lives. We were able to strengthen our relationship with them; we became sensitive to their needs and problems. This relationship affirmed our vocation to be a religious missionary priest, a man for others. This experiences has affected our lives, changed our attitudes and thinking pattern. Our presence in the colony had become a great joy to the people, because they felt that there are some people who really care for them, love them and respect them. In this process they felt that they have dignity and self worth. From this perspective our departure from the colony was painful and sorrowful.

Since we were staying in the parish we could not by pass the pastoral context. We were actively involved in the parish activities such

as helping the parish priest in the liturgical celebration, youth animation, and family visits and Small Christian Communities (SCC) prayer meetings.

The Exposure Immersion Program helped us to understand to some extent our mission for the third millennium. A priest is not a person to be concerned only about the small group entrusted to him, but he is a man for all. God's salvation comes to all people and all nations. Every one is very important. In our missionary work we cannot neglect our priestly identity. Essentially we are men of God, and therefore, called to share God experience with people along with our social developmental works. A spirituality that enables one to make necessary sacrifice in our involvement in the lives of the people is very essential to achieve this end. Here Jesus stands before us as our role model.

We think that exposure Immersion Program is very useful for Priests and Religious. This kind of program can really open our eyes to the vast majority of people who need our assistance. The program is able to transform the lives of people. It will change the traditional understanding of priesthood. We have benefited from this program and we recommend that this program must become part of our formation. We do not recommend this program for deacons, as diaconate ministry is an immediate preparation for priesthood. Hence, we suggest it to be incorporated at various levels of our formation, perhaps after philosophical studies and before the novitiate for a year.

9. *PIN, Chaddergat, Hyderabad: Jojo George and David Raju*

People's Initiative Network (PIN) is an organization run by Gabriel Brothers. Brothers, sisters of various congregations and some lay people are working together for a specific cause: the upliftment of the slum dwellers. The three main objectives of PIN are solidarity with the urban poor, understanding the reality of slums and evolving pattern of meaningful involvement in promotion of communal harmony and encouraging the children to study. The other objectives are: organization of different sections of slum communities, training of leaders, making the society aware of the problems of the urban poor etc.

There are altogether 23 schools in different slums run by PIN with 1600 students and 32 teachers. We were in charge of three schools. We were to go each day early morning visiting the schools also in-

specting if the teachers were on time and children were present. Whenever there was a need we also helped out in the activities of the school.

Having lived in the slum almost six months we would divide our experiences in two phases. First phase is the time of struggle and difficulties to cop with the situations. The second phase is our involvement with the people. This program gave us a wonderful opportunity to come in contact with the life and problems of the people. At the initial stage life was tough, hard and challenging. It was a struggle between survival and perseverance. We had to cop with lot of inconveniences. Some of the major concerns were cooking, water scarcity, hostile heat of summer, bear minimum facilities, leakage of the roof during the raining season, buying all the required things of the house etc. By being with the people who are considered by the majority outside as vulnerable, we could also understand and come to know of their needs. Of course, material help would be of great help for them. But much more than that sometimes to speak with them, listening to them and organizing different programs for them is valued to be more than material help. The miserable conditions of the people really forced us to look into our life styles. Being put in a situation with limited facilities and comforts most of the things appeared to be different. We had to satisfy ourselves with minimum things.

In this context we do feel that the spirituality we practice should be something liberative. A spirituality that has something to do with the lives of the people who are marginalised and down trodden. There need to be a shift in our understanding where we consider ourselves as someone different and superior to the people and foster the idea of being with the people in all their joys and sorrows. Our reflections, prayers and life style should be something in line with a liberative value. Our spirituality should be sustainable by our conviction that all people devoid of all the differences are memorial of God.

10. BIHAR DALIT VIKAS SAMITI (BDVS), Patna, Bihar: Jomon K.V. and Arokiasamy K.A.

Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti (BDVS) is founded by Fr. Jose Kananaikil SJ. It aims at providing and identity to dalits. BDVS tries to achieve this end through its various programs like education, social awareness schemes, banking system etc. The Exposure Immersion program in BDVS gave us a wonderful opportunity to be with the poor and marginalized people of Bihar. The dalits as they are called, and

their critical life situations taught us the value of human dignity and equality. True to the guidelines we had a first hand exposure to these people's lives, and it was our mission to immerse ourselves openly to these factual situations of the people.

The first three months we visited, stayed and experienced the real village situations of Bihar. We experienced the poverty, economic insecurity, marginalization, oppressive elements, critical living conditions etc., of the people. Why do people live in these awful living conditions? Don't they know that they are being exploited? We had such disturbing questions in our mind when we stayed with them. We discussed about their lives, their children, living conditions, their future etc. We were very critical about the government, the landowners, the high caste people and all the oppressive structures around them. Why should these people be living in fear and insecurity when they have their own rights and dignity? Why can't they get educated and become aware of their meaningless existence? Many times we were at a loss to answer the people's questions regarding their state of life.

In the second part we had a fine opportunity to be with the village youth. We stayed with them and built a good rapport with them. We taught them English, shared our experiences and knowledge. We encouraged them that they could also come up in life with handwork. They shared with us about their struggles, their aspirations and their notions about life and religion. Life was a real struggle for them as they find it difficult to earn their daily bread. This sort of practical and lived out experiences helped us to deepen our faith. These were the moments we questioned the unconditional love of God and His existence. We could not find an adequate answer. But living with them and sharing their misery in our own little ways certainly made us aware of our roles as missionaries and broadened our understanding of real life situations. Therefore, we can say that this experience has helped us to foster more openness to the given situations, respecting people irrespective of their socio-economic differences and to have personal and psychological maturity. If we are sincere we have a true mission among these people.

We recommend courses on psychology, social analysis, anthropology, and contextualized experience of human behaviour, customs, and culture to be incorporated into the curriculum.

As we have experienced the real life situations of the poor and the marginalised, we feel that our mission for the third millennium should be people oriented. Making walls and institutions may be of little use for the marginalised and the poor. Unless we reach out to the people and share their misery and fight for their cause, our mission will be of no use to the vast majority of people.

11. LOK CHETANA SAMITI, Sarnath, U.P.: Pius Lakra and Pradeep Kumar Minj:

Lok Chetana Samiti is a movement rather than an organization aiming at transforming the society through the conscientization of the masses. The specific objective of Lok Chetana Samiti is to form communities and communities in turn will strengthen the grass root level organizations that is the village panchayat to foster local leaders. It also has a women's wing which works for the development of women especially by accompanying them in their struggle for equality and justice.

We were given a new area to organize and form human communities. We found initial contacts rather difficult as people suspected us to be harijans. There were also instances we were treated like harijans when we asked for some water. That was really an experience for us, from then on we began to get into feelings of our harijan brethren.

There were anxious thoughts in our minds as we stepped into Lok Chetana Samiti. However, valuable guidance from Dr. Neeti Bhai IMS comforted us. He initiated us into a process of 'learning by doing'. Our stay and work in Lok Chetana Samiti also taught us how to be relevant where there is no Christian presence by introducing us to various alternative ministries. We were awakened to our responsibility towards nation building and transformation of the society.

Our involvement in the struggles of the people of diverse communities gave us newer and richer experiences. We began to see realities of life, our mission, faith, spirituality etc., from the perspective of diversity.

APPENDIX II

Personal Reflections on the Exposure - Immersion Program

1. *Joseph V.L (Rourkela)*

As we were informed of the new plan for our diaconate ministry my immediate reaction was silence, for there was no inkling what so ever to indicate what sort of experience that awaited. Most of us were in a confused state about the whole venture. When the question of the place of assignment came Rourkela was not my preference. Hence, when I saw the assignment I was not very much thrilled, nor worried. But my only fear was the prospect of staying in a slum. This was the mental state with which I arrived in Rourkela.

After an introduction about the place and the work of the organization from Fr. John Alappatt SVD, we ventured into visiting various slums for a week in order to have an idea of what is being done and also to get initiated into the work. After that our attempt was to establish personal relationships on behalf of Community Welfare Society in Sital Pada. When I recall the first week of my visit at Sital Pada, I would say it was a tough beginning. It was as if we were wandering in a wilderness, as we were strangers to the place and people and vice versa. So our attempt to begin a conversation with people was a failure in most of the cases as people had doubts about our being there. It was here that we received lot of support and encouragement from the fathers. They openly shared their painful experiences which encouraged us to persist with our efforts. Besides, I was deeply moved by the life struggles of the people. The more I began to understand about their life struggles, de-humanizing situations, exploitations heaped on them etc. the more it interested me to be with them and to understand them. The constant visits paved the way for building confidence in the minds of the people about us and their initial suspicion began to vanish. As a result the people began to share their difficulties and the injustice that is meted upon them. I began to understand them gradually, mainly some of their behaviour patterns. After having stayed with them, listening to them, expressing my love and concern for them I realized that I am no more a stranger to them.

Certainly I faced initial difficulty in organizing people. The initial difficulty I was faced with in organizing the people and the success that came on my way later made me realize that only constant prayer and personal conviction will keep me going. In the moments and times of difficulty the members of the community were with me with their timely guidance and encouragement. For me the six months experience was one of learning and transforming. I believe that this enriching experience will make me a better religious if I keep in mind that prayer along with personal conviction, persistence and commitment will win the race.

2. *Medard Tirkey (Rourkela)*

Seva Sadan, an institute of Community Welfare Society, is committed to human empowering, development, medical work etc. In such an institute I was quite happy to work keeping in mind the objectives of the institution. However, at the initial stage I was quite confused about my specific work in the slum. Yet I decided to face the challenge and take a risk according to my capabilities. Though there were a few established centers in two other slums, we were given a new slum, where we could have learning experience of initiating works and getting the basic experience of working in the multi-religious and multi-cultural groups of people.

Involvement in the new slum was a challenge. There were certainly initial struggles in organizing people. Disappointments and other negative experiences gradually disappeared during the course of time. Recalling the initial experience of encountering the slum dwellers is not a pleasant one. It was quite tough to enter into conversation with the people, for we were strangers and people were suspicious of us. They even thought us to be CIDs. In such a situation it was required of us to be understanding and caring. Our prolonged and constant visits dispelled the darkness of their suspicion and we could win over their confidence and trust. Gradually they began to accept our suggestions with regard to their life and conducts. In my moments of struggle what strengthened me was the valuable guidance and encouragement of Frs. John and Richard.

Having gone through this experience I am convinced that God's mission demands a tremendous commitment and responsibility. Wherever there is promotion of human values; there is proclamation of Christ. Hence working for the humanitarian cause and helping people to real-

ize their human dignity is also a way of proclaiming Christ and Kingdom values. Therefore, working with slum dwellers and sharing their miseries helped me to change my attitudes in order to be deeply committed to the person and mission of Jesus Christ.

3. *John Kennedy (Kanyakumary)*

I reached the place of exposure Immersion Program, Kanyakumary with lot of anxiety. First of all, I did not know any one who was working in the movement. They were very hospitable and friendly. So I could relate freely with them. The persons in charge gradually introduced me into the movement and to its various activities. I had time to understand the activities of the movement, which is the empowerment of the poor, particularly women.

I was working in a multi-religious context which gave an opportunity to relate with people without discriminating them on the basis of caste, creed and religion. Basically I engaged in building basic human communities. At this time of changing and challenging situations of the world I think building human communities is necessity.

I feel that the building of the Kingdom communities, where love, justice and equality prevail, is the ultimate goal of my missionary life. And I realize that my missionary life becomes meaningful by responding to the day today situation of the people and finding God working among them.

After the exposure program I am able to understand and accept different types of priestly ministries. It has given me a new orientation to the vision of my mission and spirituality.

4. *Terrance Mascarenhas (Kanyakumary)*

‘Experience is the best teacher’, is the basic concept of Exposure Immersion Program. As I stepped into the fieldwork at “Nala Oli Iyakkam” in Kanyakumary, I faced certain difficulties and inner struggle. Sharing the room with two others was a difficult experience in the beginning.

My work with the people was to establish neighbourhood group through PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) program. Since people are highly divided by caste, religion and politics, to gather them together for a five day program was a mammoth task. Many a time I

was warned by the local leaders not to bring awareness into the people by such seminars. At times I had to face failures and disappointments due to the poor co-operation received from the local people. What sustained me throughout my stay was the deep conviction that I was doing something for the voiceless and the downtrodden in the society.

During the last Six months I have learned and experienced the hard realities in the life of the poor. Though it was difficult for me in the beginning my perseverance and persistence have yielded result and today proudly I can say that I have grown more as a person.

5. *William Pais (Belgaum)*

“A person who is basically from the village set up, born and brought up in the village atmosphere and was very much part of the village life style and situation was taken and formed in a particular monastic life style, now again sent back to the villages to have an experience of the real life situation there he has seen and experience the struggles and pains of the poor. So what new experiences can he have?” This was my initial thoughts as I ventured into the Exposure Immersion Program. I had decided to see the reality from a different perspective, that is in terms of helping the people in their needs and understanding their problems more deeply. This attitude of mine helped me to venture into the program with an open mind and heart and take the things as they come.

As I started to move into the villages some of my fears and anxieties disappeared due to the support of the Jana Jagaran activists and the welcoming attitude of the poor. I learned that I need to have the courage and humility to walk and work with the poor and to learn from them what they are. I learned to tune myself to the given situation; muddy roads in the rainy season, heat waves of hot summer etc. have become part and parcel of people and they have no complaints about it what so ever. This attitude of the people helped me to go ahead with positive feelings. I learned to be satisfied with the things available.

The situation where we have been placed gave us very good opportunity to prepare ourselves for the animating and leading role we have got to play in the society. Being in Jana Jagaran and being closely associated with Fr. Joe helped me to have a full knowledge of motivating people at the grass root level. In short my exposure and immersion in Jana Jagaran has helped me to be more sensitive to the needs of the

people. It has also helped me to be more close to the people and face the hard realities of life with courage and confidence.

6. *Walter Mendonca (Belgaum)*

The period of Exposure and Immersion in Jana Jagaran, Belgaum has been a time of discovery for me. I call it a time of discovery because the rich experience during this period has helped me to clarify some of the questions that were disturbing me over the years like: my identity as an SVD, the role of a priest today, understanding of my mission and spirituality etc. Now, at the end of six months' Exposure Immersion, I feel happy and confident to share some of the insights that have become part of me during this period.

Though I did not go through much initial struggle to accommodate myself to a new set up in contact with people I began to realize that my preconceived ideas and set pattern of thinking were the biggest blocks in my involvement in social action. Hence I realized that I have got much to learn from the people and see the reality from their perspective. This revelation has made me a little more compassionate and concerned towards the poor and marginalized of our society.

Working with Fr. Joe Chenakala and his team was quite inspiring and exiting. The effective work of Jana Jagaran in empowering people really posed a challenge before me. It took me very little time to understand that it is the commitment to people that matters more than one's qualification.

I also had the opportunity to be in the farm and experience the life of a farmer for about two months. This was the time to acquire certain practical skills on running dairy farm, cultivation of feed and fodder for the cattle and sheep etc. This also gave me an opportunity to mobilize and organize people for work in the agricultural sector.

By and large I feel satisfied with the whole program. Besides, the attitudinal change it has brought about, what I would like to take home from my experiences of being with Jana Jagaran is to respond in a concrete way to a given situation considering the need of the people from the perspective of the poor leading towards building of a better society for tomorrow.

7. *Roy Joseph (Varanasi)*

I came to the center for rural development on June 1st, not like the tourist who expects to be pleased with what he/she sees, but for Exposure Immersion program - to join the people in their daily problems and struggles, particularly of the poor. Here I was exposed to various realities of life. Initially I faced many difficulties because of the sudden change from an institutional structure to a less structured set up. The people, language, culture etc., were different. But within a short period I was able to adjust myself with the new situation. The first months I found it very difficult to go to the villages because the roads were very dirty and muddy. We were entrusted with a village to form a group and I found it very difficult to bring people together and they even suspected us. But constant visits, guidance and encouragement from fathers made what appeared impossible possible, and I felt a great sense of joy and satisfaction.

Listening to the various struggles of the people was a painful experience for me. Since I was not able to give them answer I remained helpless. This experience led me to certain attitudinal change required to work with the poor. Most of the places where we remained were non-Catholic and I was quite inspired by the work of the priests in their respective places. I was also impressed by the spirituality, simplicity and dedicated service of the IMS fathers. I found sufficient time for personal prayer and reflection.

This program has personally helped me to transcend the negative and see the positive values of care, concern, family bonds that are present among the poor. Now I feel the need to move out from ministerial priesthood to prophetic dimension of priesthood for around development of humanity. I have also realized the need to be simple and available to the people. Though I faced difficulties in the beginning, my daily prayers, constant support and encouragement from others kept me going. I thank God and all those who have helped me.

8. *Michael Pragasam (Varanasi)*

Having spent almost six months at the 'Center for Rural Development' Raghoupur, Varanasi, I have learned a lot for my future missionary life. Coming from institutionalized and well set up life and getting adjusted to a less structured situation in the village was an initial struggle that was overcome as the days passed. I also found it dif-

difficult to adjust to the language but as the days went on I was able to manage with broken Hindi. I experienced helplessness when I was told to go to a new village and form a group. We made initial contacts. The people in the village questioned us about our intentions. With the guidance of Fr. Abhishiktananda, the director of CRD, we were able to get in touch with the life struggles. We shared their life to the certain extent. It was indeed a transforming experience. I was deeply touched by the sharing of a man in a village. He has no land; he and his wife had to work every day to survive. If they do not get work per day how will they eat? It disturbed me and made question our flowery language: “option for the poor and marginalized”. I felt helpless, as I could nothing except to pray for them. This led me to think about the need for a change in the content and method of our mission.

As a Divine Word missionary, I am to preach Good News. What is the Good News for the people who struggle every day? Do I need to find ways and means to improve their economic situation or do I go into the sacrament of baptism? I have not found the answer. I realized that giving communion to a faithful is not superior to giving food to the hungry.

I remember Fr. Abhi saying only a deeply spiritual man can commit fully to the social cause. This gave a push to my spirituality. We had mass and prayer everyday. These spiritual exercises gave me new insights. As a whole I enjoyed the program. It was a time of learning.

9. *Mathew Abraham (Attapady)*

Usually it is a difficult task to get settled in a place where you are totally unfamiliar. The new situation and the people living over there have to be accommodated into our lives through a process of careful interaction and adjustments. So it is quite natural that a new comer experiences certain symptoms of stress and strain in a new situation.

In Attapady I struggled initially to adjust to the situation mainly due to the minimum of facilities and the demands that were placed on us. We had to learn the basic lessons of cooking. My initial struggles were to such an extent that I wanted to get out of the place as early as possible. However, further thoughts and reflections helped me to be psychologically adjusted to the situation. This had some impact in my way of perception and dealings. I began to approach unfriendly situa-

tions in a friendly and pleasant manner desiring to bring out some positive changes. This approach had its own positive results. Another aspect that brought a sort of relief and comfort to me was the life struggles of the people around us.

I have learned to value food and had a taste of hunger in its intense form. In the beginning I used to be very much disturbed if there wasn't enough food to satisfy my hunger. Later I felt very comfortable to accept such situations with equanimity.

The experiences of Fr. Mani CST added spice to my experiences and life over there. My companion Jaison George SVD, whose good qualities came very handy for approaching people and establishing contacts, ably supported me. I learned the lesson that I need to be very sensitive to my companion in order to progress well with a meaningful community life. This was also an occasion for me to learn the lessons of contacting people and gaining their confidence and increasing faith in my own goodness and abilities. It has opened to me a new dimension of being in the mission. It has strengthened me to take challenging situations. I was familiarized with the frontier situations where people struggle to live a dignified human life. I have developed a disposition to live comfortably in lowly situations.

10. Jaison George (Attapady)

I along with Mathew Abraham reached the tribal land of Attapady on June 3, 1998 for the Exposure Immersion program. Upon our arrival we were received by Fr. Mani CST to Gramashram where we were to live for the entire period of the program. Since I was glad to have such a program, the limited facilities that were available in the Ashram did not disappoint me. Yet it will be an exaggeration to say that settling down in Attapady was without initial struggles. One of the major problems before me was cooking my own food which was an experience of learning through errors. Secondly, I was confronted with the problem of living without any timetable. However, as days went on both these problems were settled quite naturally. Besides these I did not face any major initial struggle.

The vision and objective of the Exposure Immersion Program was achieved in my case to a great extent in the form of living among the tribals of Attapady who are an exploited lot. Besides we joined in anti-liquor agitation: participated in the meetings of various people's

movements, inter religious living together, etc. Meeting people engaged in struggles for various social, political and ecological causes was a good exposure to alternative ministries.

Exposure Immersion had also helped me to look at my spirituality from a more cosmic dimension. It is a spirituality of listening to the voice of God shouting out in the needs of the people around. I strongly feel that, my personal reflections and prayer must sprout from my involvement with a created world.

The greatest benefit of this program in my case was in forming certain attitude, for a personal life. First of all I am convinced that I should not unduly depend on others for things that I could do for myself. Secondly, in order to live happily one need not have many possessions or much comfort. Thirdly, there is more to religious life than limiting it to sacramental priesthood. It is a call to reach out to God's creation in the fullness of freedom. Finally, resistance of evil must become a major concern in my religious priestly life.

During this program one thing I longed to have more was an in depth knowledge of new trends in philosophy and an exhaustive study of liberation Theology. Social analysis techniques also would have helped me more. As a whole this program has given me a vision for my future ministry and an opportunity to form certain attitudes in my life.

11. Sebastian Myladiyil (Berhampur)

Though the orientation had equipped me to a certain extent to face the challenges involved in this new venture of Exposure Immersion Program, I had some reservations and anxiety about the whole program. Reservation was with regard to the validity of the program and about its usefulness at this stage of formation. Anxiety was due to the radicality involved in the program, about the unfamiliar language, culture of the people, work etc. The hearsay about the drought prone area, Berhampur scared me. However, at the initial stage itself I decided to keep an open mind and heart to whatever awaited me and in that sense a bit of excitement had been creeping into me.

Today as I look back the six months of experience in the field, the prominent evolving is a sense of satisfaction. Initially I had struggled to cope with the summer heat, the unfamiliar Oriya language, the life style of the people, enormous travel involved etc. When I involve

myself with the people belonging to three different sections - tribals , dalits and fisher-folk - I began to appreciate their way of life, their perception of life, culture etc. The language no more became a problem as people themselves understood my condition and took initiative to teach me. Soon living in the villages even with limited facilities, hours of continuous meetings where people shared their problems, long travels on foot to the neighboring villages etc. became very interesting. People accepted me with love and shared with me what they had and this in turn increased my love for the people.

Due to PREM's involvement people have become a powerful entity and this whole empowerment process shared with me by people and animators increased my belief that with proper vision people can be attuned into a powerful force which can help them to tackle the existing problems. In my interaction with the people gradually I began to draw valuable insights and inspirations for life. One of such is the development of the compassionate attitude to people and their concerns. Alleviating the suffering of the poor and the less privileged has become an important concern for me.

During my formation I was quite unhappy with the priests who just limited their role to mere administering the sacramental needs. I had kept my eyes open to the people who were involved in alternative ministries. Seeing the empowerment process in my area of involvement initiated by two priests I have gained certain directives for my mission. The gradual attitudinal change was a painful process as it often raised questions on my inclination to live a comfortable and easy going life. Certainly it has clarified some of my doubts about what a priest must be in the twenty- first century.

The whole venture has created certain attitudes in me that can come handy in any situation. No doubt, the beginning was painful, but at the end I am grateful to the people responsible in giving me the golden opportunity at this stage of my formation. My deep appreciation to Fr. John Vattamattom and Frs. Jacob and Chacko who shared with me their initial struggle and the whole process of empowerment that has taken place today. I deeply appreciate their concern and love when I was hospitalized due to cerebral malaria which itself was a painful but enriching experience.

12. *Victor Rodrigues (Berhampur)*

Initially having equipped with the information of what the ministry on the edges mean, I reached together with my companions to Berhampur with mixed feelings of anxiety and uncertainty due to unfamiliarity of language and the NGO (PREM). But the good treatment and orientation received from Fr. Jacob made our stay comfortable. As I look back, I would say that the program has been an enriching experience. It has broadened my outlook on life, as it was a thought-provoking period with lot of information about lifestyle, culture and struggles of the people in different strata of life.

Exposure to three different contexts (Dalits, tribals and fisher-folks) created in me a genuine interest for the people and a greater sensitivity to their needs. It was a transforming period, a Passover from some of my old ways of living due to structured formation in seminary. I also came to know a great deal about the NGO's, especially PREM.

My association with PREM challenged my notion of priesthood today. I began to wonder whether it is possible at all to be a social worker and continue to be a priest.

13. *Ranjit Ekka (Berhampur)*

The Exposure Immersion program was in fact a learning experience for me. As usual I had my initial anxieties and worries about the place and program itself which gradually disappeared as I gained self-confidence in the exposure to the life experience of the people.

First of all, the NGO heads, Fr. Jacob and Chacko were sources of inspiration for me. Their love for the tribals and transparency with regard to money and other resources are conducts worth commendable. I was touched by the tribal issues such as exploitation, illiteracy, poverty etc., in spite of lot of goodness like community feeling, sharing, honesty, simple life etc., which are made use by the non-tribals to push them to the marginalised position. When I was aware of this my value system was shaken. I really felt agitated but at the same time realized my helplessness. I could feel the pulse of the tribals when they were asked to evacuate the place for the construction of the dam and factories.

I was very much touched by the person of Valerian who has organized men and women as two arms. These two groups are the secret of his success. Valerian works as a facilitator of these two groups. He continues to inspire me to be an animator in the struggles of tribals for justice.

Today I realize that my work should not be limited to welfare alone but should be one of empowerment of the masses. Jesus stands before me as a role model in the struggle for justice.

14. Callisto Gomes (Latur)

The six months of Exposure Immersion Program at Lathur for me was a time of re-collection, for rethinking and re-defining and also for assimilation. Most of the work at the CHAI camp is directed towards the victims of the 1993 earth quake. The focus of the social work being done there is gradually being shifted from relief to development. As a result of this there is a movement towards empowering people through self-employment programs. The aim is not only economical development but development of human values and human communities.

The earthquake brought about both physical and social changes. The poverty I witnessed in the area is more in moral terms, less in the economic sense. The response of the people is sometimes hot, sometimes cold. It is hard to say where their interests really lie. Only occasionally is our identity as priests manifested. But the local people do look at priests with reverence and as people who have no self-interests or hidden agendas.

Though there was not much work that I did by way of active participation in the development program, the experience in itself was different from the previous years of formation. At times life over there was dull and boring.

I honestly admit that there has been no radical transformation or attitudinal changes in me as a result of this program. All the same, the whole experience in the field and the later sharing and reflection with my companions has left me enriched. It has broadened my outlook and opened up to me the possibility of a different sort of ministry.

15. *Edward Fernandez (Latur)*

To be in a land of earthquake and to be with its victims was an enriching experience. In the initial stages it was uncomfortable to stay in a place where all things were stored and offered little privacy. Policemen were my immediate neighbours who shared the room with me.

Going with the mobile clinic, staying with doctors and nurses and helping them out was another learning experience. Being with the patients at their advanced stage of illness and taking them in the night to other hospitals for treatment has helped me to be compassionate towards the sick and the suffering.

To be part of an inter-religious group was another enriching experience. I could live with Hindus with my faith and beliefs integrating them with theirs. The program gave an opportunity to come in contact with the real life problems of the people. In the face of pain and suffering I could only pray silently Lord give them the grace to endure their pain and suffering’.

Facing the anti-social elements in RSS and SS increased my courage to face the challenge fearlessly. The people were looking for a model in me for their work and social relationships. So it was a challenge for me to live a life that was worthy of my calling.

My spirituality included moments of disappointments, happiness, surprise and anger. I could not spend long hours in prayer. But my prayer and feelings came spontaneously from particular situations of life. On the whole I can say that the Exposure Immersion Program has not made me an extra ordinary person but it certainly has given me an orientation to face reality as it comes.

16. *Louis Ronald Pereira (Puri)*

“Blessed are you! Blessed is your mother who carried you in her womb for nine months, brought you up and offered you for the service of God, and specially for the service of us poor lepers.” These are the words of the leprosy patient, which affirmed my mission and vocation. With this affirmation my initial fear and anxiety to work in the leprosy colony disappeared. My close contact, constant visits, conversation, touching them, laughing with them made me realize that leprosy patients can be my friends, they are my brothers and sisters.

Looking at and washing and dressing of wounds of leprosy patients became a time of meditation and God experience. In the process I realized that the initial struggle to get involved with the lives of the leprosy patients has transformed me and it has become a cause of great joy to the leprosy patients.

When Jesus healed the leper, two aspects were taking place. First, a miracle that a leper is healed of his sickness, secondly, the leper is reinstated into the society. In the present day context I realize the miracle of healing a leper means giving hope to the leprosy patients by accepting him/her as my brother/sister, that he/she is a child of God. I found these leprosy patients as marginalized, poor, completely dependent on the mercy of others for their survival. In spite of their misery they do not commit suicide, because they have a great hope and tremendous faith in the Lord. Their faith and hope gives them a meaning to live and I believe one day the Lord will reward them.

The life style and work of Fr. Marianus Zelezek SVD inspired me very much. He is acclaimed as the father of all the leprosy patients. I found in him the perfect integration of traditional spirituality and active missionary work.

This Exposure Immersion program made me realize that I am a man for others. My vocation and commitment demands me to dedicate my life with all its talents for the empowerment of the poor and marginalized sections of the society. I am called to challenge the unjust, oppressive, exploitative dehumanizing structures of the society and work for justice, peace brotherhood and human welfare. This program made me sensitive to the needs of the leprosy patients, with love and compassion.

17. Biju George (Puri)

Nothing can be substituted for a real personal living experience. This experience of Exposure Immersion has taught me a process of passing over. It began with an uncertainty with regard to the place of assignments, i.e., Puri leprosy colony. The Oriya language which is spoken widely in Puri is not known to me. I thought I will be a failure in this area, and the program will be of no use to me. But I went to the field with an open mind. Constant visits, familiarity to the people of the colony, conversations with them and a keen interest in their lives gained for me people's love and confidence. Once I was open to them

they too were open in turn. Through my constant contact with the patients I learned that it is not by doing so much one becomes acceptable but being there at the place is equally important.

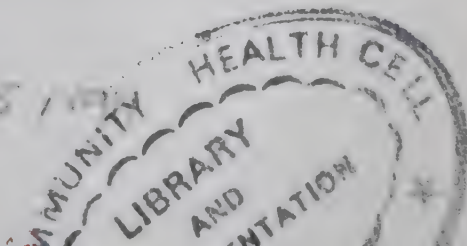
The sickness 'leprosy' itself was a block for me to work in the colony. I thought it was a dangerous sickness. Initially I somehow wanted to finish the visits and run away. But once I gathered the basic information about the sickness from the reliable sources I could stay in the colony whole day without any difficulty. After our constant visits the leprosy patients felt free to share about their lives so much so they addressed us as their own children. By visiting and talking to them I realized that these people are denied of love and dignity in the society. For me they were like friends and I did not feel awkward to put a hand around their shoulder.

These six months of experience helped me to discover a bit more of myself. My spirituality is to be a prayer which will prompt me to action and reflection and transformation of my life that there is nobody untouchable, not even a leprosy patient. Behind all these physical wounds there is a more wounded heart which is deprived of dignity in the society. It was this conviction which prompted me to talk to them in the streets with out bothering what others had to comment about it. As a whole their life inspired me very much and I consider the last six months as a golden opportunity to be with the less privileged.

18. Anuranjan Dung Dung (Puri)

My initial fear and anxiety about leprosy disappeared when I saw the caption, 'leprosy patients are friends'. It was then, I realized that they too are human beings just like me. That is where I got strength and courage to get into their skin.

Being with them was a really an enriching experience for me. In spite of the fact that they are poor, they are very generous and cheerful. In spite of their nothingness they offer you all that they have. Financially they are poor, but they are rich in human qualities. Though living a very miserable life they have a very deep and strong faith in their gods and goddesses. It is this strong devotion that sustains their lives. Seeing their faith and devotion I questioned my own faith. In spite of my security and all comfort how strong is my faith? Through their simplicity, honesty and sincerity the leprosy patients have taught me and enriched me a lot with basic human qualities. They have helped me to grow as a mature religious person.



It was through this Exposure Immersion program I got an opportunity to come in contact with the leprosy patients of Puri. If there wasn't this program I don't think I could have ever come closer to these leprosy patients. But today I can say sincerely that leprosy patients are my friends.

19. Jojo George (Hyderabad)

After having come to know that as part of the Exposure Immersion program, I would be staying in one of the slums in Hyderabad, I was really very skeptical and doubtful about the whole program. This doubt and fear doubled in intensity once I reached the place. My initial response was "what good can come out of this program and this place as well".

The initial stage I would consider as a struggle for survival. Mainly due to the unbearable summer heat, water shortage, inexperience in cooking etc. In fact I had many sleepless nights. I had to struggle hard to adjust to the situation using the common toilet, adjusting with the noisy atmosphere, running for water in the middle of the night and many other activities of this sort.

All these difficulties and struggles lessened as I got used to the situation. Though I was unhappy about the program initially I had the feeling within me that I was sent for a good purpose and I need to adjust to the situation. This thought helped me very much in adjusting. The miserable life situation of the people and the struggle they undergo to earn their daily bread forced me to look into my priorities and attitudes and this played a great role in my life in coping with the situation. The love, support and encouragement given by the brothers and sisters from PIN were remarkable and turned out to be an added advantage in this situation.

Having spent nearly six months in the slums, I would gladly say that this program was indeed a learning experience for me. It brought in me an attitudinal change. The experience of staying with the people and seeing their difficulty, urged me to appreciate people and develop sensitivity to their needs. I realized that these poor people also have something to teach us. In spite of their miserable situation they remain with life and enthusiasm. Their community spirit, feeling for one another and use of things sparingly are the few aspects which touched me most.

After this program I feel that the spirituality I practice must be something liberative and something to do with the lives of the people. Here I would like to keep in mind what Bro. Varghese SG shared, "Our spirituality should be sustained by our conviction that all people are memorial of God."

20. *David Raju M (Hyderabad)*

When I saw my assignment to Hyderabad for the Exposure Immersion Program, I had my fears and anxiety as I had been to that place already. A letter of invitation from Bro. Varghese giving me a brief account of the conditions in which I would be placed frightened me all the more. With these anxiety, worries and uncertainties I reached Chaderghat, the place of my experience.

As severe summer heat was prevailing in Andhra during the end of May and the beginning of June I had sleepless nights due to profuse sweating and heat. This continued till the first Monsoon rains which brought in some relief. The room in which we were staying was very small and had hardly any space to move freely. There were many other inconveniences and difficulties such as cooking, collecting drinking water, adjusting with minimum facilities etc.

As I had no previous experience of cooking it became a major concern. Gradually I learned by trial and error and I consider it as a great achievement. In slums you will never know what time when the water comes, hence, I had to keep awake to collect water at odd hours. Besides collecting I had to preserve it for two days, as the water supply was only once in two days.

In PIN Bro. Varghese by way of his simple life remained as an example for me. It was because of him that I could accept my struggles to a great extent. As I got involved in the lives of the slum dwellers my difficulties gradually became light. My preconceived and set attitudes changed as I started living amidst the people undergoing the same difficulties of the millions of such people in our country. Initially it became difficult for me to digest, but once I started accepting and looking at the realities from the perspective of the people at large it became easy for me to move on. Above all I have learned many things during this six months, which has brought about a change of attitude in me.

21. *Jomon K.V (Bihar)*

I looked at this program as a new initiative taken by the superiors as a new attempt at introducing a challenging scenario for the seminarians. The initial struggle and inconveniences came mainly from the situations in which we were placed.

I spent this time of exposure and immersion as a tool to look up on my personal values and convictions and reflect up on them more deeply. I found, this chance giving me a sound reflection on the theology, mission and my type of work in the future. I found the more I was open to the situation the more I was able to understand the people and feel for them. I also discovered my weak points and the areas I need to grow in order to carry on with my dedicated life.

I realized that I need enormous stamina and inner energy to sustain my openness to the reality around me and to respond to it effectively. To conclude I would say my making of a better human person would be the earnest reward I can give to the Person beyond me and the world around.

22. *K.A Arokia Samy (Bihar)*

When the Exposure Immersion program was proposed my immediate reaction was rather negative. I was a bit confused and suspected the effectiveness of the program. Added to this, I was sent to Bihar. It was to my knowledge a land of murders, kidnaps, looting and arson. As we reached The Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti (BDVS) we were welcomed and introduced to the administrative system of the center. In the beginning I was finding it difficult with the summer heat. Added to it was the ignorance of the language and unscheduled manner of life. After a month of stay in the head office we decided to stay in the villages. Visiting the people in the villages and staying with them was an enriching experience. This helped me to overcome some of my initial fears and anxieties.

I had a very good opportunity to be with the village youth, sharing their life style and knowing their faith experience. In spite of their misery and struggle they have a deep faith in God and take their struggle as part of their life rather than a curse from God. My spiritual depth was in a way challenged in the process of my involvement with this secular organization.

The six months of experience with the Dalits of Bihar was certainly a stepping stone in deepening my convictions. I do believe that I need to be deeply rooted in the messages of the Gospel to take the Good News to the people at the grass roots. Experience was the best teacher during my stay with BDVS. In spite of my initial reluctance and difficulties, openness to the life situations enriched my diaconate experience. I do believe strongly that if I am open to the spirit, the spirit will guide me in whatever situation I am placed. Thanks to the superiors for giving me this opportunity to experience the life struggles of the people through which my convictions are deepened and attitudes have been modified.

23. *Pius Lakra (Sarnath)*

During the course of the Exposure Immersion Program I have had very many new experiences. They have immensely enriched my life so much so that they have become part and parcel of my life.

Personally I faced no struggles initially but certainly there was an anxiety about the type of work I was going to do. Initially I had the feeling that this program was forced up on me. But soon I realized that it was a golden opportunity at the door of my life. The more I took personal interest in it the experience became all the more enriching. Initially I felt that I was not equipped or trained to be in this apostolate, but gradually I discovered that it is a learning process by doing.

At the outset of this program I was worried about what to do. But with the guidance of Dr. Neetibhai I was led to a process of action-reflection-action. This helped me to theologize and reflect more on life experiences that are concrete and down to earth.

The experience offered me an opportunity to learn to be relevant in a place where there is no Christian presence. It created in me a new sense of responsibility towards nation building and made me aware of my share of the transformation of the society. The experience of caste discrimination and un-touchability directly and personally realize the pain and trauma of a discriminated person.

It was a new experience to live and work with diverse communities and be with those coming from various back grounds. All these helped me to build new relationships and grow spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. I am very positive about this program and feel that the experiences I had are very relevant in our mission today.

24. *Pradeep Suman Minj Sarnath*)

Various kinds of experiences have shaped and moulded my life. But my Experience in Exposure Immersion Programmes has been something new and special. It has enriched me as an adult human person.

My initial inner struggle was in relation to venturing into a new ministry that was completely different from the traditional pastoral ministry. At the beginning I was not willing to take risks and face difficulties but when I began to see it as an opportunity life began to move smoothly.

As I stepped into the ministries of involvement with the people I was anxious, as I was not trained for this type of work. But the valuable guidance of Dr. Neethi Bhai inspired me to do the work through 'learning by doing'. Dr. Neethi led me to a process of 'action-reflection-action'. This process helped me to theologize and reflect on concrete life experiences.

The program was an opportunity to be relevant in a non-Christian set up. The rich experience has generated within me a new sense of responsibility for the nation building. It was also a time to reflect on the life situations in the light of the scripture. I realized that God was speaking to me through the communities built on diversities and this was my God experience. I am grateful to the superiors who organized this program for me at this stage of formation. Sincere appreciation to Dr. Neethi Bhai and the animators of the organization who helped me to have a meaningful experience among the dalits.

APPENDIX III

Process and Organisation

“Experience is the best Teacher”- so the saying goes. And there is no doubt about it. The exposure-immersion Programme for the SVD Deacons in 1998 was based on this. Knowledge is best when it is both theoretical and practical.

Our formation however organized and well thought out it is, lacks certain amount of realism. “Away from the World” monastic spirituality is still lingering around quite a bit. Any attempt of practical experiment still remains sporadic though attempts for contextualised theology etc. are taking place here and there. Our formation also prepares us more for pastoral type of activities, “Caring for the Souls” by administering sacraments. With the result very little are we prepared to take other type of activities to bring about the Reign of God among those who are not baptized Christians. This calls for a bit of re-thinking in our formation.

Contextualised formation with exposure- immersion in to the real life situations and problems of the people, especially the poor and the marginalised is an essential part of any meaningful formation today. This question came up for discussion during the Inter-Provincial consultation and planning meeting held at Ishvani Kendra, Pune from 18-20 September 1997. At that time, I as Mission Secretary offered to organize an exposure-immersion programme for following batch of deacons, during their diaconate ministry, for a period of six months. This was on principle agreeable to the members of the planning Body (consisting of the three Provincial administration, formation Secretary, Mission Secretary – superior delegate-National coordinators of brother formation communication and Biblical apostolate and the provincials of SSPS and their mission Secretary as invitees) and from then on I started the preparation for the same.

Objectives:

Following were the broad objectives:

1. To give an opportunity for our deacons to come in to contact with the life and problems of the people, and particularly the poor and the marginalised.

2. To develop sensitivity to the needs of the people.
3. To help them in their growth and development as a person, as a priest and as a member of SVD congregation.
4. To expose them to various other alternative pastoral ministries other than the traditional sacramental ministry.

Expectations :

Following were some of the expectations expressed by the deacons when asked during the orientation to this Exposure-Immersion Programme.

- To learn something for life
- To learn to take personal responsibilities
- To enable me to be close to people, facing realities.
- To transform my life.

During the mid term sharing and reflection these objectives and expectations were reviewed in the light of experience. Accordingly modifications were also made.

The whole Exposure – Immersion program was once again reviewed at the end of the six months in the presence of the provincials, formators and with the help of some of the resource persons.

Details:

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| May | 17, 1998 | : Arrival Pune (DWS) |
| | 18-24 | : Introduction and Orientation to Pastoral course in general. |
| | 25-27 | : Initial input on exposure-immersion-The What?, Why? How? of this Programme How to take maximum benefit out of this programme? |
| | 27/28 | : Departure to their respective places of assignment. |

- June-1 Aug-15 : Involvement with people in their respective places (for batch I)
- June-1 Aug-22 : Involvement with people in their respective places (for batch II)
- August 15-22 : Mid-term sharing, reflection, evaluation, input for batch I
(including travel to and from venue)
- August 22-29 : Mid-term sharing, reflection, evaluation, input for batch II
(including travel to and from the venue)
- Aug. 23 to Nov.-15 : Further involvement with the people (for batch I)
- Aug.30 to Nov.-15 : Further involvement with the people (for batch II)
- November 18-21 : Final Sharing, reflection, evaluation in Mumbai.

There were two venues for the mid-term sharing, reflection etc.

1. SADBHAVANA, DELHI

2. MARIA BHAVAN, BANGALORE

The group was divided in two batches. Those placed in the Northern part including Orissa, the mid-term session was in Delhi, and those in Southern part in Bangalore.

The final sharing, evaluation etc. were in Mumbai. For this, the provincials, Formation Secretary, Rector, Vice-Rector DWS, Pastoral course Director etc. were present.

Resource persons were also arranged for the initial input session in Pune, mid-term sessions both in Delhi and Bangalore, and final evaluation in Mumbai.

As part of the process, I personally visited the deacons in their respective places and held discussions with them.

-Fr. John Vattamattom, SVD

